CONSIDERING TURKISH STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN TEACHING ENGLISH COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract: This article concentrates on the importance of teaching "intercultural communicative competence" to the students of English language as it helps to improve their communicative abilities in the target language. It is emphasized in the article that the textbooks should at first give Turkish culture and move slowly to the target culture so that students won't feel inhibited and strange as we go from simple to more complex and from known to the unknown. That's why, considering Turkish students' communicative competence in teaching English communicative competence turns out to be an important issue just beginning to be considered by the textbook publishers and English teachers; this study aims at contributing to the acceptance of the issue.

Key Words: Communicative competence, Intercultural communicative competence, Turkish culture, English culture, Role playing

After the Functional Approach, language teaching research has concentrated on "communicative competence" with Dell Hymes in 1967. As a brief definition, communicative competence is: The aspect of our language competence that "enables us to convey and interpret messages to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts" (Brown, 1987, 199).

However, Alptekin (2002) has challenged this approach with a new look on communicative competence by asking the question: "whose communicative competence?" during post-modern era. Alptekin claims that it depends on who are using English when deciding what type of communicative competence the students should have.

Byram (1997) also criticizes communicative competence, as it is developed within the tradition of organizing foreign language learning according to the native speaker model. This way of accepting foreign language learning implies that the learner has to comply with the standards of the native speaker without questioning them. He believes that native speaker model is an impossible target for the learner and has the danger of losing one's own cultural identity in the process of striving for native speaker-like communicative competence.

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Kramsh (1993), too, note s that the native speaker's model for language learners is not satisfactory enough as it tends to empower the native speaker not the language learner. In today's world, we are not using English only to communicate with an American or an English person, but it helps us to communicate with the people of other nationalities, as a lingua franca. The concept of intercultural communicative competence, then, is the process of the communication between at least two people with different cultural backgrounds, so it is necessary that both of them perceive each other's differences in a certain 'correct' way which leads to efficient communication. "Thus, the English used for communication between, say, a Dutch and a German will typically be different from that used between a Greek and a Spaniard, and those will be different from the English used in a company of people from all these nationalities"(Sifakis, 2004).

Beginning from here, we can also say that Turkish-English, itself is an international variety of English, and will not be the same with other international varieties e.g., the English used in Asia or South America. Therefore, Turkish learners should be made aware of this growing phenomenon in using English in communication.

Other scholars also raise concerns related to ethno-linguistics, anthropology, educational sociology and educational linguistics and discuss language policy and language planning, critical pedagogy and discourse analysis. All this type of research has proven that we should start teaching English from known culture to the unknown.

But how should we integrate this more into our syllabus? In other words, how should we consider Turkish students' communicative competence in teaching English? Suggesting a communication, comprehensibility and culture based approach, rather than structure based, Sifakis(2004) recommends language teachers to train learners to concentrate on the communication itself, by

●monitoring their own communication techniques and dealing with breakdowns of communication (e.g., by making repairs);

●recognizing miscommunication resulting from misattribution of meaning and making adjustments; ultimately, learning about one another's personality and culture.

Sifakis also points out that English teachers should make the best of existing coursebooks but should have a critical eye for dominant structure-based features in them. Tasks:
must have a genuine communicative orientation;
must be realistic, challenging and motivating—depending on the circumstances, learners can be asked to air their views on language matters by discussing, for example, the function of minority and majority languages in their region, or the effects of the growing spread of English has on theirL1;

must not ask learners to `be someone else' (e.g., a NS);
must not treat learners as cultural stereotypes- learners should be treated as individuals with their own distinct identity and ideas.

Due to the scarcity of communication-based material, and provided s/he has the learners' approval, the teacher can record such discussions and file learners' assignments for future use with other English classes. After all, the best resource of genuine English material are English learners themselves, and in particular those who have been exposed to real-life situations and tasks.

The Analysis of the Textbooks:

Do the textbooks in Turkey give enough of Turkish students' communicative competence? We have analyzed the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade textbooks in the secondary public schools and the 10th grade in the high schools and we have found out the following results:

Course book is an important material in teaching foreign language. Especially teaching English seems impossible without using a course book or a material. Learners who start to learn second language in their earlier life face some difficult problems. If a learner does not have linguistic competence, s/he cannot perform. Now there is a question on this competence especially with learner's communicative competence. The question is, must Turkish culture take part in course books? Language means a combination of communicating with other people and utterances. So learners have to communicate with each other in class in their native language. When we examine the course books in Turkey especially the primary school course books in Turkey that are for the 4th, 5th and 6th classes we see that the Turkish culture is given clearly in context. When we think the learners' ages and interests and also their views, we will realize that they are not able to understand the target language easily. Firstly, they learn their own culture because of their natural environment. Whenever they look at their environment they will see their culture, buildings, schools, men, women. This way the learners will be in difficulty with the target culture. In the 4th and 5th classes, we see that the names are written especially in Turkish. E.g. "Ayşe is a student". The writer has to use it in this way because the children in that age cannot distinguish the differences in two cultures. If we say "Jim is a student", it will not have any sense in their minds and they cannot be aware of the fact that who or what Jim is. Is it a pencil or a boy or what else? The same problem can be experienced in pronunciation. During our pre-study for this presentation one of the primary school teachers told us an interesting point about this. She had written "Jack is a boy" on the board and wanted the students to read it, they all read as 'cacık' as it is in Turkish. So whatever you do they will all connect the words with their own culture and it is very normal for a child to behave like this. Because s/he is not even aware of his/her own culture.

Also when we look at pictures in the 4th, 5th grade course books we see that students wear uniforms and the teachers wear suits as it is in Turkish culture, the classroom is the same as a Turkish classroom also there are Turkish flag, a blackboard ,a picture of Atatürk…etc as in every real Turkish classroom (See appendices 1&2). This is very normal because if we draw pictures with no uniforms or the teachers without wearing suits, at this time the students will not understand easily why it is so (See Appendix 3). But as the students get older and older in the 6th, 7th,and 8th classes, less Turkish culture is given in the textbooks. The subjects become more cross-cultural, the subjects and dialogues are more in English culture. Not totally but partly we can see the Turkish culture. For example, while describing a place, the books firstly describe the cities in Turkey e.g. Istanbul is the biggest city of Turkey, mentioning about its historical places, etc.; then a city in England or USA (See Appendix 4). That's why they learn something given more detailed in their history and geography lessons. But it is impossible for a child aged under 10–12 to understand the culture or the place or the other countries.

Infact, we cannot teach a language without using our own culture because it is a new world for us and the things that take place in the course books may seem strange to us. This happens in every course book written in USA or Great Britain. Only the grammar books written by Turkish authors give the Turkish culture in many chapters in the course books and this is a good step towards a more communication-based language teaching.

We have also found out that Turkish culture must take part in the books for younger students'classes between 4th and 5th grades, but it must be diminished step by step. Nunan's "Schema Theory" (undated) also supports this idea. Because if we want to teach a foreign language, we must also teach its own culture. This way the language they learn will be visualized in their minds. Learners' world views and context in the coursebooks should match with each other. For example in the 4th and 5th grades course books Turkish culture is designed within games letting the students enjoy reading it (See Appendix 5).

Suggestions and Solutions

1-Firstly, teachers should decide whether they will get the students to acquire or learn the foreign language. If acquisition is the target, we should give a more communication-based approach rather than structure-based. Teachers should give native culture first then step by step and implicitly the target culture should be given so that learning can be turned into acquisition.

2-Foreign publishers should co-operate with Turkish teachers while preparing those textbooks so that they can catch up with younger learners easily. In the same way, rather than having a prescriptive tendency to force every learner from every culture to learn English speakers' communicative competence, big foreign publishing companies should communicate with each nation's English teachers and the textbooks should be prepared in this way.

3-Teachers should be interested in their students' interests, levels, ages, personality factors Brown(2000) and also their environments and their local lives; with a more emphasis on role playing.

4-Other than textbooks the teachers should also use some additional materials and learners' own experiences to enrich the cultural background.

5-Teachers must use visual and real objects in the class effectively to communicate naturally. In order to increase cross-cultural experiences ,teachers should choose the subjects dealing with both cultures. The subjects can be chosen from the current events like Iraq conflict, September 11th attacks, tourism, sports, celebrities, Turkish and English food and drink and recent developments in Science.

6-It has been found out that the Turkish culture is sufficiently given in the 4th and 5th grade text books, partly in the 6th grade but not enough in the 7th and 8th grade course books. The case is even worse in high school text books and it is suggested that the Turkish culture must take place more in the course books.

The solutions that come up first are as follows:

1. Existing textbooks should be revised or new textbooks should be published with a critical eye on the structure-based parts and with a tendency to increase the communication-based parts. And more importantly, teachers should prefer more the textbooks which start with Turkish culture and then move implicitly to the target culture.

2- Since the communication-based materials are not abundant, the material design can be created by the teacher with the active help of the learners themselves. Due to the scarcity of communication-based material, and provided s/he has the learners' approval, the teacher can record such discussions and file learners' assignments for future use with other English classes. Ultimately, the best resource of genuine Turkish communicative competence material is the Turkish learners themselves, and in particular those who have been exposed to real-life situations and tasks. And all this material should be recorded and filed for further use.

3- At every chance possible, in and out of class, the students should be encouraged to speak and write about their personality and life style, their national and cultural background, without worrying about the structure in the second place.

4- Role playing can be part of the process in giving cross-cultural matters, but as the time goes along and accompanied by national and even local settings.

Özet: Bu çalışma, "uluslararası iletişim yeteneği"nin İngilizce öğrencilerine verilmesinin önemi üzerinde durmaktadır; çünkü bu onların hedef dilde daha iyi iletişim kurmalarına yardımcı olmaktadır. Ders kitaplarında once Türk kültürüne yer verilip, sonra yavaş yavaş hedef kültüre geçiş yapılması gerektiği, aksi halde öğrencilerin utanıp sıkılıp rahatsız hisssedecekleri vurgulanmaktadır. Basitden zora, bilinenden bilinmeyene doğru gitmekte yarar vardır. Bu nedenledirki, İngilizce'nin öğretiminde, Türk öğrencilerin iletişim yeteneğini dikkate almak önemli bir husus olarak ortaya çıkmakta ve buna ders kitabı yayınevlerinin ve İngilizce öğretmenlerinin yeni yeni önem vermeye başladıkları görülmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, bunun öneminin daha fazla benimsenmesine katkıda bulunmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İletişim yeteneği, Kültürlerarası iletişim yeteneği, Türk kültürü, İngiliz kültürü, Rol yapma.
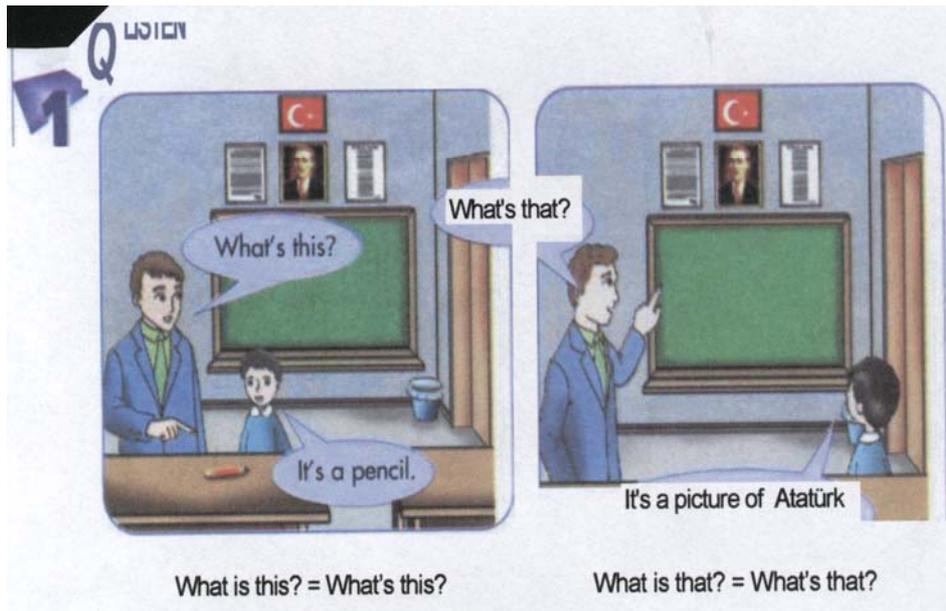
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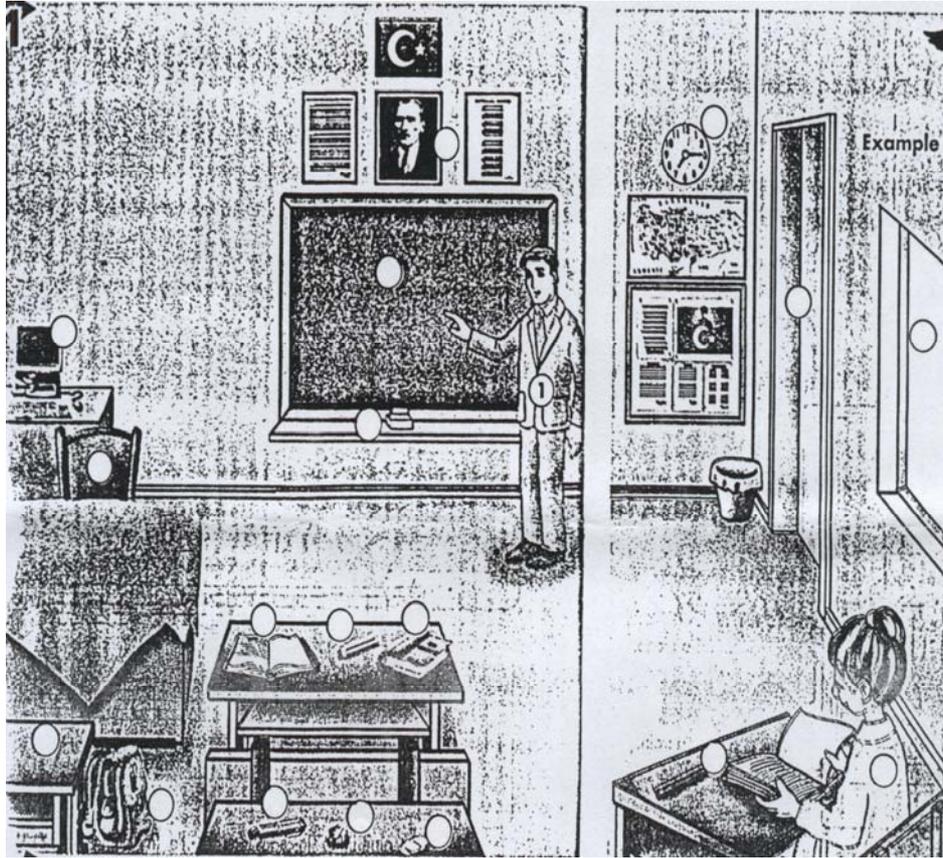Yalçınkaya,L. (2003) Easy English Pasifik Publications,Ankara,2003

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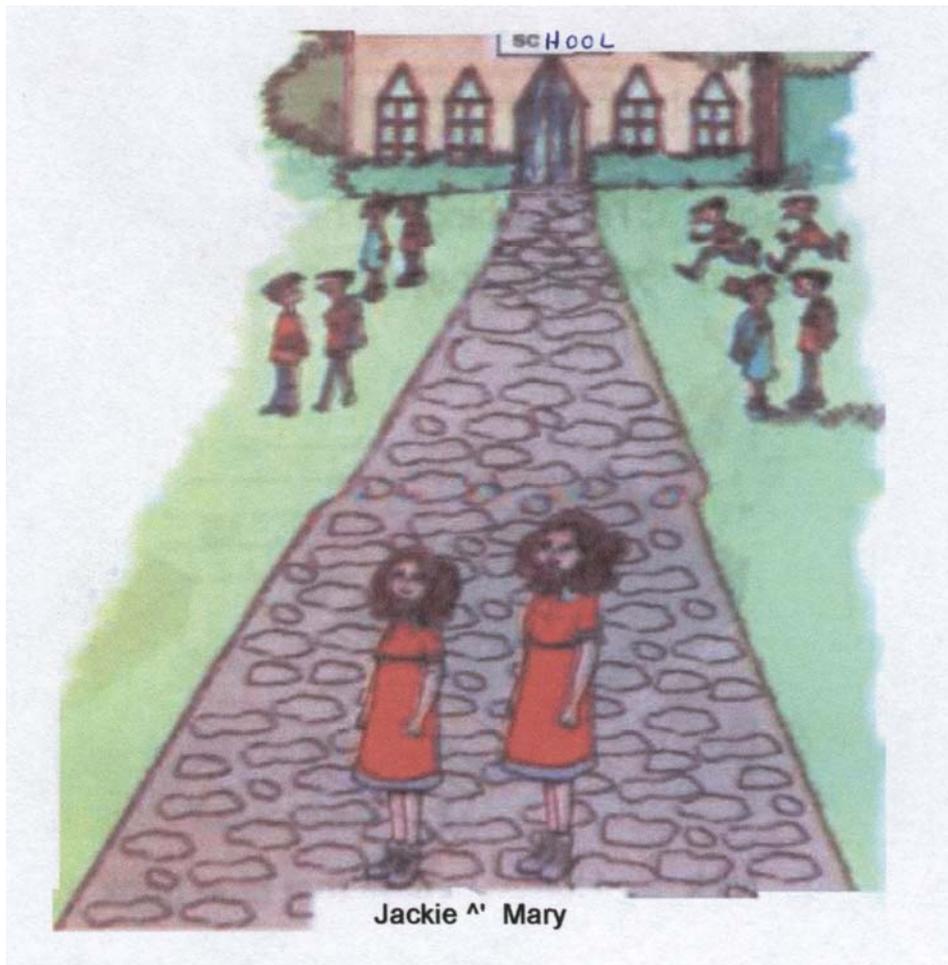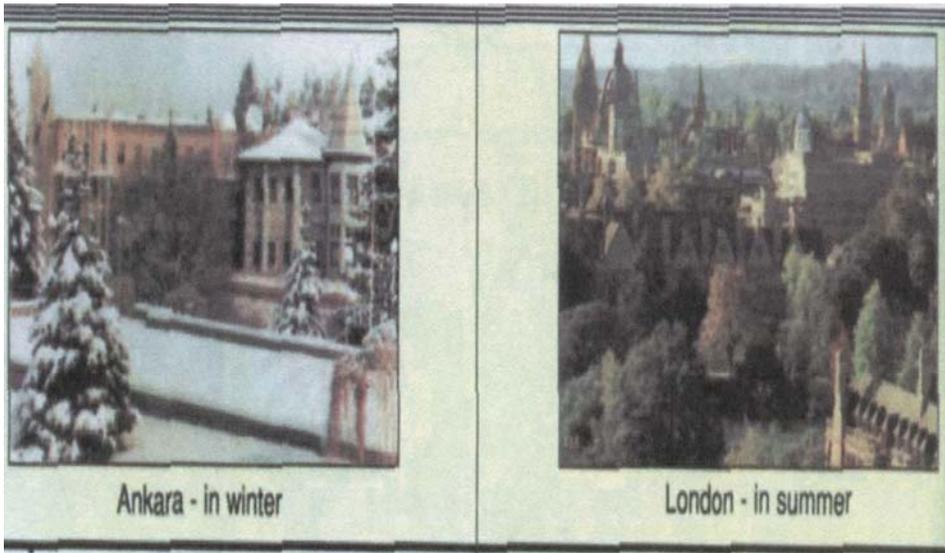
Appendix:

Appendix 1-

What is this? = What's this?   What is that? = What's that?

Appendix 2-

Appendix 3-

Jackie ^' Mary

Appendix 4-

Ankara - in winter   London - in summer

Appendix 5-